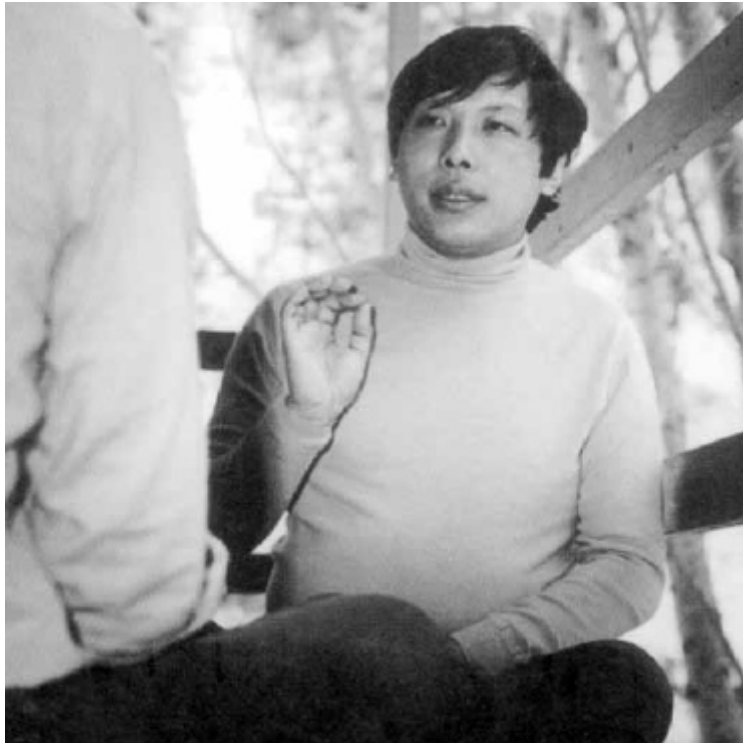


OCEAN OF DHARMA

A yearlong series of teachings to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the death of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, founder of the Shambhala Sun.



A Meditation Instruction

By CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA RINPOCHE.

Doubtlessly, meditation practice is one of the most important and at the same time most confused subjects that we experience. It's confusing because of our own expectations that the practice of meditation should bring about a certain sense of tranquillity, equilibrium, and spiritual "high."

I would like to emphasize that the practice of meditation as it was presented by the Buddha is no more and no less than working with yourself—sitting with yourself, alone, without entertainment, without further feedback and encouragement.

The sitting practice of meditation is one of simplifying one's basic psychology and one's basic problems. Simplifying

in this case means having no expectations about the technique, not expecting that the technique is going to liberate you or provide flashes of excitement or mystical experiences. In keeping with how the Buddha taught, I would like to present the situation of meditation extremely simply, without metaphysical or philosophical overlay.

To benefit from meditation, you need more than just a glimpse. You need to make a commitment to training yourself in meditation. Otherwise, there will be a lot of gaps and missing the point, and you will experience unnecessary confusion. So it's important to stick with the practice and follow the instructions that you receive. It might be best to look at meditation as a way of life.

If you stick with the practice and go along with exertion and patience, you will have a chance to realize yourself, to understand yourself. Such understanding may be extremely boring. Such understanding may be seeing something you don't want to see. Nevertheless, we can't reject ourselves before we know what we are. So I encourage you to be brave, from that point of view. Please don't chicken out and either reject yourself or congratulate yourself. Rather, try to work with the techniques and the tradition that is presented to you.

The practice of meditation in Buddhism is a very simple technique that was recommended by Lord Buddha himself. I myself have been trained in this technique. Meditation in the Buddhist tradition is connected with the idea of bhavana, a Sanskrit word that refers to spiritual exertion or discipline all together. That is the basic point of meditation: unless you are inspired to discipline yourself, it is hopeless. If you only discipline yourself halfway and then give up, that will create congestion and indigestion for yourself.

From that point of view, meditation can be very demanding. If you stick with it, however, if you sit regularly and follow this discipline, you will develop understanding and become skilled in the clarity of the practice. Your experiences won't be dramatic, by any means. The practice will purely lead to discovering yourself, I'm afraid. You won't see cherubs and gods, heavenly realms, colorful mantras, or yantras—none of those.

Meditation is very simple and extremely down to earth, to the extent that it's irritatingly down to earth. Through the down-to-earth practice of meditation, you can see the colors of your own existence. The earth begins to come back to you rather than that you are getting messages from heaven, so to speak.

All together, meditation in Buddhism is extremely severe. I don't want to convert you to this particular style or approach necessarily. But I think it is worthwhile to apply your exertion to the practice of meditation; that is necessary if you want to learn something from the practice. I have personally learned from this practice. I don't mean this as a testimonial, particularly, but I feel I should share with you that I have gained wisdom and clarity myself from this practice. I'm giving it to you as I have learned it, as I received this myself. The only difference is that you don't speak Tibetan.

According to the Buddha, meditation is a three-fold process. The first stage is what is called shamatha. The second process is vipashyana, and the third is the combination of the two: shamatha-vipashyana. Shamatha, which I am presenting here, means the development of mindfulness. It can be practiced in group situations or individually. The meaning of mindfulness is up to you to discover.

This particular approach to meditation practice is paying attention to what is happening. It focuses mainly on your breath, your ordinary breathing. If you've been running and then you stop and sit down, the first thing you do is to try to regain your breath. At that point, you pay attention to your breathing. Or if you are doing things and then you want to relax, then you sit down and say "pew." So breathing plays an important part in ordinary experiences. Breathing is quite natural. It's a natural situation, part of what we naturally associate with relaxation.

Shamatha literally means the "development of peace." Peace in this case doesn't mean a state without war. It has nothing to do with politics. We also are not talking about a psychedelic sense of getting off on peace. Here, we are simply talking about peace as non-action. If you are having an intense time with your friends, your parents, or with your business, you might sit down and say "pew!" Peace is that kind of flopping down. But please don't misunderstand what I'm saying. You can't get this kind of peace instantly. You have to apply exertion and patience.

In the practice of meditation, we speak of peace in a very particular, extraordinary, and eccentric sense, as it was taught according to the Buddha. The Buddha was a very eccentric person, in that he attained enlightenment, which is extraordinary. Initially, we can't actually understand what it means that he attained enlightenment—but he did. We are also on that path. We have no choice. In one of the sutras, the Buddha says that those who practice dwelling in peace, or shamatha, are building a staircase toward enlightenment.

That is what we are doing in the practice of meditation: constructing a staircase toward enlightenment. It requires very precise measurement of the boards to build the steps properly. All the angles have to be properly considered, and you have to use the right nails and hammer them in carefully, because this staircase has to bear the weight of people walking up it. Shamatha practice is building a staircase very deliberately, according to the Buddha. A staircase to what? To enlightenment? What is that? It doesn't really matter. Just building the staircase may be good. No promise, no blame. Let us simplify the situation. Let us build this staircase very simply and directly.

When you practice meditation, don't make a big deal about it. Just sit down, relax, and straighten your back, not to the extreme but in a deliberate fashion. Your posture is a bit like how you would hold yourself if you were going to ask your lover to marry you. Your approach would be semi-relaxed—friendly and somewhat seductive, but straightforward. That's how your posture should be here. Then you place your hands on your knees, which is known as the mind-relaxing posture, or in whatever position you have been instructed in.

Then you should just feel your breath, your natural breath. It might be rough or deep if you had to run to get to the meditation room. Or your breathing might be quite shallow. It doesn't really matter. Just feel your existing natural breathing. Sit quietly and listen to your breathing. To begin with, just listen to it for a few minutes. In that way, you can settle into the practice.

Then you can begin to discipline your state of awareness, your state of inquisitiveness. When you have nothing to do but sit and breathe, you begin to wonder, "What can I do with myself?" Those thoughts are fine, but then try to focus everything on your breathing. Listen to your breathing, feel your breathing, completely, properly, as much as you can. But don't force yourself. Don't hold yourself too tight, like an Englishman with a stiff upper lip. Here, you are dealing with your breathing very naturally. It's just natural breath. You sit there as though you're about to address your lover. You just sit there and go along with your breathing.

You follow the breathing, very simply. Particularly pay attention to the outbreath. Go along with it. Don't particularly try to feel the temperature of the breath in your nostrils or anything like that. Just breathe out, and as your breath goes out, you go out with your natural breath, very simply, extremely simply.

In terms of the staircase you are building, it requires enormous precision and enormous subtlety to build these steps. That is related to working with the out-breath. There's a general sense that you're there. You are not trying to become frigid or rigid and solemn about the whole practice. You are simply being there. When you sit, you actually sit. There's no room for speculation. You sit. You actually sit. You actually do breathe. The sense of simplicity is almost to the level of naivete. You do things completely, wholeheartedly. You do things as they are. You actually get into things as they are, completely, correctly.

Your breath goes out and dissolves into the atmosphere, the space around you. Don't try to follow it out too far. Let it be. Then, there's a gap, some uncertainty maybe, and your breath comes in automatically, as a natural physiological function. At that point, don't try to bring your attention back into your lungs and your body particularly. Just let it be, let it drop. So your attention is dropped, your breath is coming into your lungs, and then another breath goes out and you go out with it again. It's very simple. There should be a sense of simplicity to the whole thing.

While you're meditating, all kinds of thoughts arise: thoughts about your life, your future plans, conversations with your friends and your relatives. All kinds of things come through the mind. Let them come through. Let them just come through. Don't try to say whether they are bad or for that matter whether they are particularly good. Just let them come through, as simply as you can. By letting them come through, you find that there's a sense of openness. You don't find your thoughts threatening or particularly helpful. They just become the general gossip, the traffic of your thoughts. If you live in a city, you hear the traffic coming through your windows: there goes a motorcycle, there goes a truck. There goes a car, and then there's somebody shouting. At the beginning, you might get involved in or distracted by the noise, but then you begin to think, so what? Similarly, the traffic of your thoughts and the verbosity of your mind are just part of the basic chatter that goes on in the universe. Just let it go through.

Whether you sit and practice alone or in a group situation doesn't make any difference. If you find it difficult to meditate and want to stand up and walk out of meditation, the group situation does help you not to chicken out. It also provides a sense of fellowship.

At the same time, whether you are sitting in a group or physically alone, you are always sitting alone. You might have been told that even if you don't have a solid commitment to meditation, the good vibrations in the room will pick you up. The energy will uplift you in any case. But that's not possible. The sanity that one person experiences in the sitting practice of meditation is not transferable. That kind of cosmic hitchhiking doesn't exist. Everybody's in their own little vehicle, which is called a body. There's no room for anybody else in that particular body. Everybody has their own car, their own body, so that in fact you can't hitchhike. You need to acknowledge that, and the sooner, the better, because then you won't have unrealistic expectations. You will realize that you have to pull yourself together, rather than waiting for somebody to rescue you.

Sitting practice is independent and individual and a very lonely journey. Aloneness is the basic point. Whether you sit in a group or individual situation, there is a sense of loneliness. Sometimes you might feel completely isolated and cut off in your experience. But sometimes you might experience this aloneness as the basis of heroism. In the positive sense, you are making a journey, and nobody's

telling you to make this journey. You are making the journey alone. The only help that somebody can give you is to tell you that others have made this lonely journey and that you could do so as well, in the same way.

This might seem like a very severe process, very strict. But it is very cheerful, because there's a sense of conviction that you aren't going to hitchhike; you are going to do this yourself. There is a powerful sense of celebration in this, which is the heart of the practice of meditation. The sitting practice of meditation is the expression of celebration, rather than falling into a trap or imprisonment. You no longer have to go through exaggerated sociological, psychological, or bureaucratic trips that we create for ourselves. You could get into the practice simply and directly, starting with the breath. Get into it, simply go along with it, and work with it. That's the basic point of shamatha.

Having done that deliberate practice of relating with one's awareness, simply and directly, without question, then you begin to relate to sound, smell, sight, and every experience that you have in the sensorial world with exactly the same awareness. You see things simply and directly. You're with them and with your breathing. You're simply there, very simply and very directly there. There are no interpretations: Is this going to be good enough? Am I making mistakes? No such questions arise if you are being simple enough. The questions come from looking, questioning, lying back, analyzing, trying to make sure. Questions only arise on the basis of how to secure your basic ground as ego. If there is no ego-oriented question, there are no other questions. Instead, your practice is a statement, somewhat. It is extremely direct and deliberate. The basic point of shamatha is this sense of deliberateness. You are actually doing something. You are getting into this particular process, without making sure that what you're doing is okay. Things are actually taking place almost of their own accord, very simply and directly. That is meditation.

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